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Rebellion, Reconstruction, and Redemption, 1861-1893: The History of Beaufort County, South Carolina, Volume 2

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Review

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Wise, Stephen R. and Rowland, Lawrence S.. *Rebellion, Reconstruction, and Redemption, 1861-1893: The History of Beaufort County, South Carolina, Volume 2.* University of South Carolina Press, \$44.95 ISBN 9781611174847

An Impressive Case Study of the Rise and Fall of a Biracial Society in Civil War and Reconstruction South Carolina

Rebellion, Reconstruction, and Redemption, 1861-1893 is the second of three volumes on the history of Beaufort County, South Carolina. It is a history that authors Stephen Wise and Lawrence Rowland argue serves as “a reflecting (not refracting) mirror of the state’s history and of the south’s coastal regions.” The volume begins in 1861, when the arrival of Union forces made possible the “Port Royal Experiment” that was designed to transition the now masterless slaves to freedom. It ends in 1893, when a great hurricane thwarted the fusion politics that the authors argue “might have become a successful model of biracial democracy in the New South” (xii).

The work draws heavily on the “names, not numbers” tradition (xiv), and perhaps its greatest strength is in its insightful descriptions of the key persona. A few examples serve to represent this technique: By his “fierce campaign to create a coastal homeland for the freedmen,” David Hunter guided a transformation in a way “few, if any, other army commander” could have. Hunter and his naval counterpart Samuel Du Pont “forever changed the Beaufort District.” They were replaced by John Dahlgren and Quincy Gillmore, men who “though they were sympathetic to the plight of the freedmen, it was not their top priority” (225). Robert Smalls, the slave who became a national hero during the Civil War and then the area’s long time dominant political force is convincingly described as Beaufort’s “indispensable man” during Reconstruction (552). His political rival W. J. Whipper is presented as “undoubtedly the intellectual leader of Beaufort’s black community” during the same period (485). The “grand deceits” of Frenchman Peter Papin won him the moniker of “Beaufort’s notorious

speculator" (517-519). William Elliott "probably saw more combat action than any other Beaufort Confederate officer" and became "a quintessential Hampton democrat" (566). Numerous other such characterizations bring to life the narrative in a very readable and memorable way.

In addition to these rich explorations of personalities, Wise and Rowland succinctly and expertly analyze several of the region's important themes. These include the difference between the sea islands, where "Union occupation provided a laboratory for emancipation, education, land redistribution, and free labor economics built around a burgeoning freedmen population," and the mainland where "white southerners, who managed to preserve control over their real and human property until the final months of the war, even in defeat, were unwilling to surrender their perceived rights" (439). There is also the demographic tension between freed slaves and their former masters, as well as between "new northerners and old southerners" who lived side by side after the Civil War (463). Of course the famous Penn School is well represented, but refreshingly so also are several of the other schools that "laid the foundations of the public education system in South Carolina" (475). The reader is left with a clear understanding of the dominant themes that defined the era and region.

Wise is the director of the Parris Island Museum and the author of *Lifeline of the Confederacy: Blockade Running during the Civil War* and *Gate of Hell: The Campaign for Charleston Harbor 1863*. Rowland is distinguished professor emeritus of history at The University of South Carolina. He co-authored *The History of Beaufort County, South Carolina: Volume 1, 1514-1861*. With the help of Gerhard Speiler, they have produced a masterful second volume of Beaufort's history which ends with the Hurricane of 1893. Where Volume 2 focused on "the events and influences of political revolution," Volume 3 will focus on "the events and impact of environment and human ecology" (xv). If this present volume is any indication, readers will not be disappointed with this next addition to Beaufort County's historiography.

Kevin Dougherty is the Assistant Commandant for Leadership Programs and adjunct professor at The Citadel. He is the author of The Port Royal Experiment: A Case Study in Development (University Press of Mississippi, 2014).